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# van Cortlandt Mansion

Erected 1748

Now in the custody of The Colonial  
Dames of the State of  
New York

*Exhib. Mary Lanman (Dowd) "Mrs.  
Morris P. Ferris"*

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May 26. 1897*



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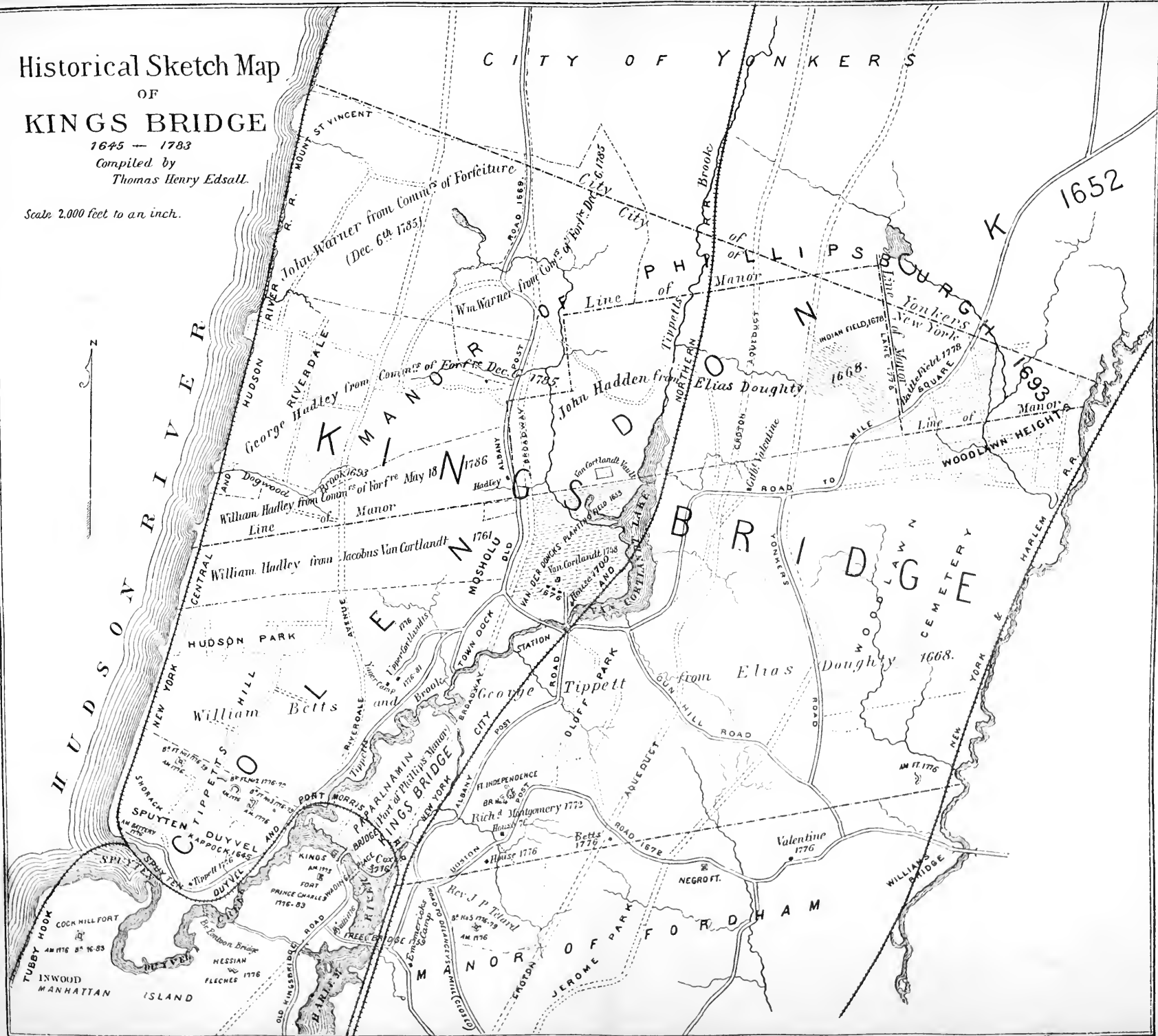


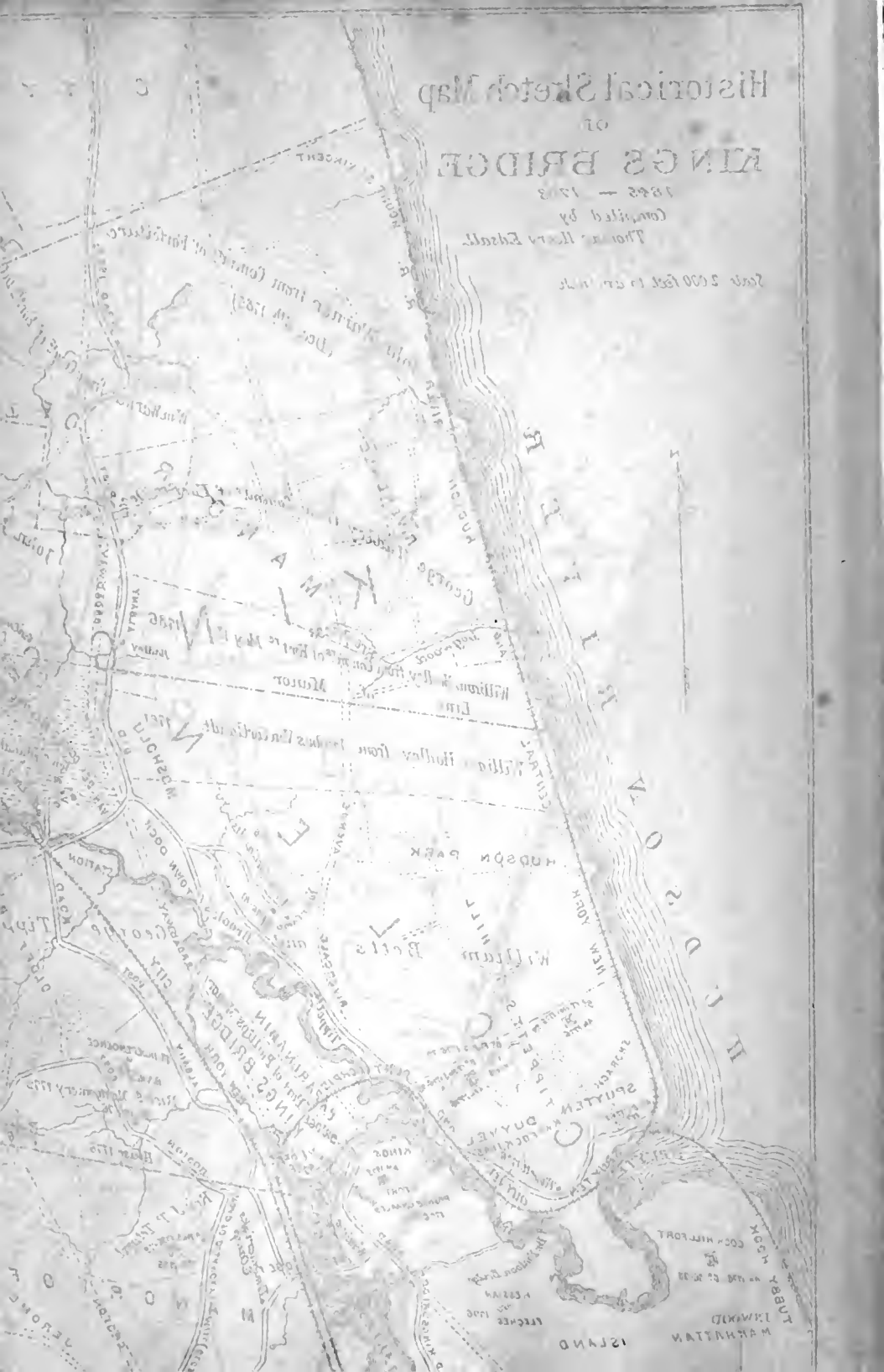
# Historical Sketch Map OF KINGS BRIDGE

1645 — 1783

Compiled by  
Thomas Henry Edsall.

Scale 2,000 feet to an inch.



[illegible]



## **The van Cortlandt Mansion**

was built in 1748 by Frederick van Cortlandt.

Land purchased by the City of New York for a public park, 1889.

Placed in the custody of the Colonial Dames of the State of New York by the Board of Park Commissioners, for a term of twenty-five years pursuant to an Act of the Legislature in 1896.

Opened as a Public Museum by the Society of Colonial Dames of the State of New York, on May 27th, 1897, the 250th anniversary of the landing of Governor Petrus Stuyvesant on the Island of Manhattan.



The Museum will be open to the public free of charge on every day of the week except on Saturday, when an admission fee of twenty-five cents will be charged to aid in defraying the expenses of maintenance.

Collect. Storage





THE VAN CORTLANDT MANSION.

*The Society of Colonial Dames of the State of New York, incorporated 1893, with a present membership of three hundred and fifty, commends itself to the public as a society formed for historic research and conducting its affairs purely on historical lines.*

*Its brief life already shows a record for philanthropic deeds which should be the *raison d'être* of all patriotic organizations. Five hundred dollars, the proceeds of a course of lectures on Colonial History, have been distributed among the poor of New York; prizes of gold pieces and medals have been established in the Normal College for essays on Colonial History; this latter work having been inaugurated by Mrs. Lydig M. Hoyt, whose recent death has been an incalculable loss to the Society; the historic places in the Mohawk Valley are being marked in an appropriate manner; and a calendar of the wills on file in the offices of the Secretary of State, the Court of Appeals and the County Clerk, has been transcribed and published by the Society.*


*With a desire to make itself a power for good in the community, the Society of Colonial Dames of the State of New York takes up its latest work, the preservation of this Mansion as a public museum, and under the wise leadership of its honored President, to whom the organization is largely indebted for its prosperity, the Society will seek to make the Museum an object lesson of Colonial and Revolutionary times.*

M. L. D. F.

*The author has drawn from the Histories of Westchester County, by Bolton and Scharf, and papers by Mrs. Martha J. Lamb, Benson J. Lossing, John Austin Stevens, Thomas H. Edsall, and many other authorities. Thanks are also due to Mr. Kelby of the New York Historical Society, Augustus van Cortlandt, and John Bradley James, Jr.; also to Mr. Edsall, for his courteous permission to reproduce his Historical Map of King's Bridge.*



## The van Cortlandt Mansion in van Cortlandt Park.

HE History of the van Cortlandt Mansion carries us back to the historian of the New Netherlands, Adriaen van der Donck, who enjoyed the distinction of being the first lawyer in the Dutch colony in the New World.

van der Donck was a graduate of the University of Leyden, and an advocate in the Supreme Court of Holland. Arriving at Nieuw Amsterdam in a bark belonging to Kiliaen van Rensselaer, in the autumn of 1642, he immediately entered upon the duties of the important office of sheriff of the *Colonie Rensselaerwyck*.<sup>1</sup>

His *Description of the Nieuw Netherland* was published in Holland in 1656, the

Book which as a leading star  
Directs toward the Land where many people are,  
Where lowland Love and Law all may fully share.<sup>2</sup>

He was allowed to give advice, but was forbidden to plead on the novel ground that, "as there was no other lawyer in the colony, there would be no one to oppose him." He was one of the committee who represented to the States General the remonstrance of the people against the oppression of the servants of the West India Company. This remonstrance resulted in granting to the people certain rights, which may be said to be the first charter of Nieuw Amsterdam.<sup>3</sup>

It was owing to van der Donck's exertions that the first church at Fort Orange (Albany) was built, and the services of Dominie Megapolensis secured.

<sup>1</sup> N. Y. Hist. Coll. New Series, Vol. I, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> Evert Nieuwhof, 1655.

<sup>3</sup> Mag. of Amer. Hist., Vol. XXVII, p. 402.

As a reward for negotiating an important Indian treaty at Fort Orange, van der Donck had been granted by Director Kieft a large plantation on the Nepperhan River, but the indispensable requisite of a Dutch farm, a salt meadow, was lacking here. In search of something to remind him of his farm in Holland, he found about a mile above the wading-place (King's Bridge) "a flat with some convenient meadows about it," which he secured, in 1646, by purchase from the Indians Tackarew, Claes, and seven others, and a grant from Director William Kieft.<sup>1</sup>

On the flat just behind the present grove of locusts, north of the old mill, he built his *Bouwerie*, or farm-house, with his planting field on the plain, lying between Broadway and the present lake, and extending to the southerly end of Vault Hill. In 1649, he went to Holland as the representative of the Commonalty of Nieuw Amsterdam, leaving his house only partly finished. During his absence his grant of land was made a Manor, of which he was to be Patroon, and which he called *Colen Donck*.<sup>2</sup> In accordance with the privileges granted to the patroons, he sent out colonists and supplies for his Manor, and, in 1652, accompanied by his wife, mother, a brother and sister and a suitable retinue, was about to set sail for Nieuw Amsterdam, when the West India Company notified him that his services were still needed in Holland. Word was brought him that various portions of his land were occupied by "land-greedy persons." In despair he appealed to the West India Company, begging them to protect his "flat and salt meadows," and so importunate was he that, in the summer of 1653, he was allowed to return to his Manor. He reached Nieuw Netherland in the autumn, and at once went to his *Bouwerie*, which he did not long enjoy, as he died in 1654.

In 1655, during the Indian massacre, when all the outlying inhabitants of the Nieuw Netherland fled to Nieuw Amsterdam for protection, his *Bouwerie* was deserted and

<sup>1</sup> This tract had been granted to the Dutch West India Company, August 3d, 1639. Albany Rec. C. C., 62.

<sup>2</sup> Donck's Colony.



destroyed. His widow, the daughter of Reverend Francis Doughty, Patentee of Mespath, Long Island, became in course of time the wife of Hugh O'Neale, of Patuxet, Maryland, and van der Donck's tract<sup>1</sup> became known as "O'Neale's Patent," by a new grant in 1666, made to O'Neale and his wife. Owing to their residence being at a distance, they assigned the patent to Elias Doughty, a brother-in-law of O'Neale. In 1668, William Betts, an Englishman, by trade a turner, and his son-in-law George Tippet, purchased from Doughty two thousand acres, Tippet receiving a special deed of gift from Doughty, including the site of van der Donck's *Bouwerie*. Tippet was rather a curious character. He gave his name to the Governor as one "ready to serve his Majesty" on all occasions, yet his neighbors' swine often disappeared, only to reappear with Tippet's ear-mark, which was that the ears were cut so close that any other marks would be cut off. As a necessary consequence, he was often seen in court. The tract covering the site of the van Cortlandt Mansion was conveyed by Doughty to Thomas Delavall, Frederick Philipse and Thomas Lewis, Philipse afterward acquiring the interests of Delavall and Lewis. During the last half of the seventeenth century, it is supposed that a group of houses, inhabited by all the population of the Yonkers outside of Fordham and Paparinamin,<sup>2</sup> together with a good and strong block-house, stood in the neighborhood of the van Cortlandt Mansion. Frederick Philipse, a carpenter by trade, came to Nieuw Amsterdam in Stuyvesant's time, and for five years worked on the forts at Nieuw Amsterdam and Esopus. He was fortunate enough to woo and wed Margaret Hardenbrook, the buxom widow of Pieter Rudolphus de Vries, a prosperous trader. Mrs. Philipse was a thrifty Dutch lady, and inclined, even after marriage, to manage her own affairs. She went to and from Holland as supercargo of her own vessels, in one of them bringing over, in 1679, the Labadists. With the

<sup>1</sup> This fief was called by the colonists *de Jonkheer's Landt*, *Jonkheer* being a term in Holland applied to the sons of noblemen. The English corrupted it into Yonkers.

<sup>2</sup> An island on the southern shore of King's Bridge.

aid of such a wife, and by his own exertions, Philipse soon became the richest man in the Colony. His wife Margaret died in 1692, leaving a daughter, Eva, a child by her first husband; and Philipse married the widow of John Dervall, the daughter of Olof Stevense van Cortlandt. Jacobus van Cortlandt, the brother of Mrs. Philipse, married Eva Philipse, as she was styled by her stepfather.

Jacobus van Cortlandt was an eminent New York merchant, the second son of the Right Honorable Olof Stevense van Cortlandt, who came out to the country in the military service of the West India Company. His house was built a little north of the Mill. Jacobus van Cortlandt bought the fifty acres known as George's Point,<sup>1</sup> in 1699, from Philipse, his father-in-law, adding to it several hundred acres while he lived. He made a mill-pond by damming up Tippet's Brook, and set up a grist and saw mill. He devised to his only son Frederick van Cortlandt his "farm situate, lying and being in a place commonly called and known by the name of *Little or Lower Yonckers*." Frederick van Cortlandt married a daughter of the good old Huguenot Augustus Jay, by his wife Anna Maria Bayard. His son and heir, Colonel James van Cortlandt, nobly used his influence, while residing in the Mansion, in ameliorating the condition of his suffering countrymen. It not infrequently happened that a poor neighbor was robbed of everything he possessed. Then Colonel van Cortlandt would assume his red watch-coat and, mounting his horse, ride down to the city to intercede on his behalf. He seldom applied in vain, so universal was the respect for his character.

The van Cortlandt Mansion is built of rubble stone, with brick trimmings about the windows. It is unpretentious in appearance, yet possessing a stateliness all its own, which grows upon the visitor. It was erected, in 1748, by Frederick van Cortlandt—a stone on the south-east corner bears the date—and preserves within and without many of the peculiarities of the last century.

<sup>1</sup> This purchase was increased and kept intact in the family, until acquired by the city of New York for the present van Cortlandt Park.

The will of Frederick van Cortlandt, dated the second of October, 1749, recites: "Whereas I am now about finishing a large stone dwelling-house on the plantation in which I now live."

Built on a plateau on the eastern slope of the river chain of hills, it commands an extensive interior view. The long and smiling vale of Yonkers stretches beneath it, and to the southward the placid landscape ends in the Fordham Heights.

The Albany Post Road goes up on one side of the valley, and the Mosholu Tavern there was at one time the stopping-place for all travelers. Fenimore Cooper has immortalized this section of the country in his famous tale of Revolutionary times, "The Spy," and, in fact, the whole region teems with memories and landmarks of by-gone times.

The style of architecture of the house is essentially Dutch. The old Dutch builders were thorough masters of their trade, and put up a structure which is as strong to-day, as when New York was a colony. All the windows on the front are surmounted by curious corbels with faces grave or gay, satyrs or humans, but each different from the other. *Felix Oldboy* innocently asked if they were portraits of the van Cortlandts, and the owner replied, "Yes, and that the particularly solemn one was taken after he had spent a night with the boys." The window-sills are wide and solidly built into the thick stone walls, as was the fashion of the time, and vary somewhat in form in the second story. The side-hall and the dining-room, with the rooms above, belong to an addition built a year or two later than the main house, and the "lean-to" is an addition of this century.

The history of the house is full of romance, and it stands to-day one of the most interesting relics of the Colonial period. The interior is not less quaint and individual. An air of the olden times, which would have charmed the heart of Hawthorne, still pervades the whole building, and the Society of Colonial Dames have endeavored, so far as was possible, to restore it to its original

condition. Everything has been done to re-invest the house with some semblance of its dignified past and the historic memories connected with it.

## **The Glass**

in the front and side windows presents a most interesting scientific problem.

It has all the appearance of ground glass, though it was perfectly transparent when first placed there. Close examination reveals a process of disintegration, spiculæ of glass falling off when scraped with the finger-nail. Scientists fail to account for it, though theories are many and varied. Some years ago the rows of stately box, renowned for height and antiquity, which stood in the old garden, were cut down, and the glass inserted since shows no decay. It has been presumed that the box and exposure to the salt water of Mosholu Creek are in some way responsible for the phenomenon. The heads of the Tiffany Glass Works—and no more reliable authority can exist—are so far baffled as to a solution.

"The glass is very poor," they write. "If it were not decayed on both sides, it would be easy to solve the reasons for its conditions. There must be some particular local influence. The decay on the outside is of a form well known, and can be accounted for; but that on the inside is entirely unknown to us." A fuller report is promised later.

## **The Main Stairway**

rises from the front hall with many windings to the second and third stories. At the first landing, directly opposite the front door, is a large window filled with small

old-fashioned panes of glass. The antlers in the front hall were taken from a deer shot on the place. Deer are said to have frequented the vicinity as late as 1782.

### The Parlor.

The southeast room, known as the drawing-room, has a handsome mantel of carved wood, a fine specimen of Colonial handiwork. On the iron back of the fireplace, Adam, Eve, the serpent and tree of forbidden fruit are displayed. Across the east, or rear hall is

### The Dining-Room.

This room has been somewhat modernized, although an old wine closet in the side of the chimney still remains. It has entertained historic guests. Here Generals Washington and Rochambeau dined on July 23, 1781,<sup>1</sup> after having reconnoitered the woods on the northern part of Manhattan Island. Later William Henry, Duke of Clarence, afterward King William IV., dined here with Rear Admiral Robert Digby<sup>2</sup> of the British Navy, and so pleased were they with their entertainment, that on their return to New York they sent to their host, Augustus van Cortlandt, the huge teak-wood vultures that surmounted for many years the posts of the old gateway facing the stables. These vultures, of grotesque form and truly heraldic design, have a history. They were part of the spoils taken from a Spanish privateer during the Revolutionary

<sup>1</sup> On July 23d, 1781, General Washington and General Rochambeau dined with Augustus van Cortlandt and returned to their camp in the evening. Itinerary of General Washington, 1775-83, p. 229. "History of New York," Thomas Jones, Vol. I., p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Digby, "Rear Admiral of the Blue," was, in 1781, appointed to the chief command on the American Station, and had under his especial charge Prince William Henry, afterward William IV. "Balfé's Naval Biography," Vol. I, p. 192.

War, and were considered even then in the light of curiosities. They have been given to the Colonial Dames by Mr. Augustus van Cortlandt, and may be seen in the front hall.

Men prominent in the civil and military life of the day were frequent guests, and the walls have resounded with the laughter of the British and of American patriots.

How the uncovering of the brilliant mahogany and the toast of "Absent Friends and Sweethearts" was the signal for a merry bout, when convivial song added to the charm of the occasion and "flinching" was not allowed. It is said a deserter, seeking to escape the "glass too much," broke from the festive hall, cleared the front steps at a bound, followed down the lane by the whole company in hot pursuit, and, to the cry of "view halloo," with one brave leap cleared the five-barred gate.

Lobster salad was an especial dish at Cortlandt House for generations, and its peculiar excellence lay in the fact that the lobsters, caught in the Sound daily, were bled to death. A puncture was made in the neck and the lobster was then hung for several hours before being cooked. The van Cortlandt hams were far famed. The pork was raised and fattened on the place, and the immense hams were the main dish on state occasions. They were cured very salt, which tended to increase the thirst for the famous "van Cortlandt madeira" and the "White port."

## The Washington Room.

The southwest room is unchanged since the time when the Hessian Commandant of the Green Yagers<sup>1</sup> occupied it, and General Washington made it his headquarters just before his triumphal entry into New York on Evacuation Day, 1783. Around the fireplace are old-fashioned blue

<sup>1</sup> The Yagers, or Jagers, were a body of light infantry armed with rifles. The word is from the German *to chase*.

tiles that tell scriptural stories in the quaint way then prevailing, "when saint and sinner were alike a sight to behold."<sup>1</sup>

The deep window seats are suggestive of comfort, and the andirons, which have a history of their own, speak of huge logs, mulled cider, rosy-cheeked apples and hickory nuts.

In olden times, it was a guest-chamber and later a library. It will now be used as the Museum, where Colonial and Revolutionary relics will recall to mind the past, with its memories, sad and tender. It was in this room that the brave Captain Rowe expired in the arms of his bride-elect, and his ghost is said still to haunt it on the anniversary of his death. Captain Rowe, of the *Pruschank Yagers*, was in the habit of making a daily tour from King's Bridge round by Mile Square,<sup>2</sup> for the purpose of reconnoitering. He was on his last tour of duty, having resigned his commission for the purpose of marrying Elizabeth Fowler, of Harlem. As he was passing with a company of light dragoons, he was suddenly fired on by three Americans of the water guard of Captain Pray's company, and fell from his horse mortally wounded. Word was sent to St. John's Rectory, near at hand, for a conveyance to remove the wounded officer. The use of a horse and gig was secured, and the dying man was taken to the van Cortlandt House. In the meantime an express had been sent to Miss Fowler, who, accompanied by her mother, hastened to the side of her dying lover, who had just strength enough to greet her, and then fell back in her arms dead.

The fireplace has been restored, and the room presents the same appearance as when Washington occupied it.

On June 26, 1775, General Washington with his suite, attended by several New York military companies, and likewise by a troop of gentlemen of the Philadelphia

<sup>1</sup> Felix Oldboy's "A Tour Around New York," p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> "This land next northerly from Eastchester on the other side of Brunckses (Bronx) River." Fairfield Records. Tradition says it was given by Frederick Philipse as a dower portion when his daughter Annetje married Philip French.

Light Horse, commanded by Captain Markoe, and a number of the inhabitants of New York, set out for the Provincial Camp at Cambridge, near Boston. The General rested that night at King's Bridge at Cortlandt House, and the next morning proceeded on his journey.<sup>1</sup>

### On the Second floor

are three large bed-rooms; the northeast room still having the old Dutch tiles around the fireplace, with their scriptural illustration.

### The old Wine-room,

in the northeast part of the third story, still shows the ancient hand-hewn beams and wrought-iron nails. The old lock is also curious, as are the wooden pegs which hold the beams together. There are several curious locks in the house, particularly one on the door of the southeast chamber opening into the rear hall. An economizing of space in the landing in the rear hall also denotes Dutch thrift.

All the beams in the mansion are hand-hewn, and the cedar and cypress laths, hand-made. The manner of joining the doors on the third story is also curious.

### The Kitchen,

with its huge fireplace and brick oven, shows how well our ancestors provided for creature comforts. It is highly probable that this kitchen was built a year or two after the erection of the main house.

<sup>1</sup> "Itinerary of General Washington," p. 71.



Some years ago an ash-room back of the brick oven was removed, and several bottles of metheglin were unearthed, so incrustated by the heat of the ashes that it was necessary to break the neck of the bottle in order to reach the honeyed beverage of our forefathers.

## The Cellar

will be found most interesting. The hand-hewn oaken beams measure eleven by thirteen inches. The two loop-holes on the western side prove clearly that the builder made preparation for defense, and it is safe to say that originally the present windows were all loop-holes. It will be noticed, from the peculiar formation, that they were so formed that the musket would fire away from the stoops. It was a famous cellar. The régime was that usual in the good old days of madeira and port, when annual provision was made, by the old and half-old being refilled in the order of their succession. Later demijohns of the famous vintages, under the name of their importer, or the vessel which brought them, took the place of this primitive practice. Then the well-stored vaults held *Blackburn*, *March and Benson*, *Page*, *Convent*, *White*, and other well-known importations of madeira in profusion; and the "*White port*" held undisputed rank. Nor must the "*Resurrection madeira*" be forgotten; so called because buried during the Revolution and dug up at its close. In the Museum will be seen a quaint wooden lock taken from an old door in the cellar. The walls are three feet in thickness.

## The Ground in Front

of the house was artificially terraced, and ornamented, after the Dutch manner of gardening, with large box-trees, and

here and there small sheets of water and diminutive fountains. The grounds were interspersed with ancient trees still standing. A splendid row of horse-chestnuts, reputed to be one hundred and seventy-five years old, flourish with a still youthful vigor, and overshadow with a grand arch of limbs and leaves where once stood the old gate-posts surmounted by the Spanish vultures. The road to the house has been slightly altered. In the olden days, flagging extended from the side entrance to the front, and the clattering over the stones announced the visitor long before he mounted the three or four steps to the house, and rested on the side benches, now restored; until the half-door swung open to admit him to the broad hall.

### The Old Gun,

lying on the right of the front stoop, was dug up by William Ogden Giles on the site of the American Fort Independence, and has been loaned by him to the Colonial Dames.

The twenty-one nine-pounders carried off from the Battery by the Sons of Liberty, August 23, 1775, were hauled up to King's Bridge and left in charge of the Minute Men. On the night of January 17, 1776, these guns were loaded and stopped with stones and rubbish, and later had to be unspiked at the cost of 20s. each. They were afterward mounted in the works erected by the American troops on the hills about King's Bridge.

In the beginning of the Revolutionary War, May 8, 1775, Congress appointed a committee of five, including Col. James van Cortlandt, Gouveneur Morris and Gen. Richard Montgomery, to fortify the approaches to New York City. The principal fort built by order of this committee was Fort Independence, situated on Tetar Hill, then the property of General Montgomery, purchased by him in 1772. After the evacuation of Fort Washington,

Colonel Lasher, then in command of Fort Independence, was ordered to evacuate the Fort, burn the barracks and remove the guns. On October 28, 1776, he carried out the order given him, but being unable to procure horses to move the cannon, he dug a trench, which afterward proved to be the western corner of the foundation of Wm. Ogden Giles's house. In 1853, while building, Mr. Giles dug up fourteen of these guns. He gave twelve away to different organizations in the county and kept two, one of which he lends to the Museum at van Cortlandt Mansion.<sup>1</sup>

To the northeast of the Mansion rises Vault Hill, so called from the family sepulchre upon its summit. From this spot the view is most charming. The vault itself is a small square edifice surmounted with a pointed roof, the whole inclosed by a solid stone wall.

The field which was cut in two by the tracks of the New York and Putnam Railroad was once a burial place of the Indians, and later served the same purpose for the few inhabitants of the region.

To the northeast is an opening of the woods, where the dust of eighteen of the forty Stockbridge Indians, who fell beneath the British bullets, while fighting on the side of the Colonists, lie in one grave, still unmarked by a stone. All through this region the plow and spade of the builder or workingman turn up cannon-balls, rusty fragments of bayonets and other reminders of the bloody struggle which raged here for eight long years.

When the parade-ground, just north of the Mansion, was leveled and graded, some curious Indian fireplaces and pottery were found, indicating an important ancient Indian settlement, covering about fourteen acres. These discoveries, made John Bradley James, Jr., of Riverdale, have proved of great interest to the archæologist. A good-sized brook formerly ran through the northerly end of the plain, turning off at a right angle to the east, at about its center. The brook has since been drained and covered. Southward of the bend was the village site. The soil was rich,

<sup>1</sup> The history of the gun's services during the American Revolution will be found in detail in Scharf's "History of Westchester," Vol. I., chap. 19.

the result of generations of cultivation, having been tilled since it was the planting-field of van der Donck. It was an ideal camping-place, combining beauty of location and the conveniences of a rude life. The adjoining woods abounded in game. The soil was loam, and easily tilled. A clear stream of water sufficed for domestic uses, and clay suitable for making pottery was found along its banks, while the Harlem River and Spuyten Duyvil Creek abounded in fish and shell-fish of all descriptions. The tribe was known as the *Waquareskeeks* or *Keskeskicks*, a sub-tribe of the great Mohican nation, immortalized by James Fenimore Cooper. The early settlers called them the *Wickers Creek Indians*. *Keskeskick* means "the birch-bark country," in allusion to the prevalence of birch-bark trees, still plentiful to-day. The skeletons of thirteen Indians were found here almost intact. The interesting collection made by Mr. James can be seen in the Museum of Natural History in New York.

## The Mill.

At the southern extremity of the lake which bears the family name of the van Cortlandts, an ancient mill, which has ground corn for both friends and foes of American Independence, nestles among overhanging chestnuts and elms, and looks out upon a miniature cascade and rapids, which babble to the great trees on their banks the same song that they sang more than a century ago. Not much is known about the old mill. It first stood just below the locust grove northwest of the van Cortlandt Station, and was removed by Augustus van Cortlandt about 1823 to its present site, he having built the dam at about that date. The original mill was a one-story building. When it was removed, another story was added to the grist-mill and the saw-mill was built. During the Revolution both sides used the mill, as the fortune of war placed it in



THE VAN CORTLANDT MILL.



the hands of one or the other. Up to 1881, the grist-mill was turned by a large wooden wheel. It ground the corn of the neighboring farmers until the summer of 1889, when the City of New York came into possession.

The mill-pond, now called van Cortlandt Lake, was made by Jacobus van Cortlandt, about 1700, by damming Tippet's Brook, a stream called by the Indians *Mosholu*, and subsequently known as Mill Creek, Yonkers River, and Tippet's Brook. This stream rises in Yonkers and flows southwesterly until it forms van Cortlandt Lake. Below the lake it is a tidal stream to its outlet into Spuyten Duyvil Creek.

The van Cortlandt family were proprietors with their own skilled laborers, making them independent of their neighbors or the outer world; upon their farm they raised their own flax and wove their own garments, had carpenters, blacksmiths, millwrights and masons, raised their own stock and constructed their own buildings, the existing mansion being built from materials from their own grounds and by their skilled craftsmen.

They were good patriots, these early van Cortlandts, and a stiff-backed race.

During the early part of the Revolution, the mansion was garrisoned by a picket guard of Green Yagers, the officers having their headquarters there. During the Revolution, King's Bridge constituted the "barrier" of the British line when they occupied New York Island, while as far north as the Croton extended the neutral ground. Many a skirmish took place between the patriots and De Lancey's loyal Refugee Corps, the French and the Hessians, and here occurred the bitter struggle with the Stockbridge Indians, who had joined Washington, and the Queen's Rangers under Colonel Simcoe. The scene of the engagement lies northeast of the Mansion. An alarm having been given, and the approach of the Indians being momentarily expected, Colonel Simcoe threw out a picket and took post in a tree convenient for observation. At length, seeing a flanking party of the enemy approaching, the troops were ordered into ranks, and had hardly

accomplished the movement when a "smart firing" was heard from the Indians, who were exchanging shots with Lieutenant-Colonel Emerich of the advance guard.

The Queen's Rangers were moved rapidly to gain the heights, and Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton immediately pushed forward, with the hussars and light cavalry, but, in consequence of the fences in the way, was obliged to re-return farther upon the right. This being reported to Colonel Simcoe, he broke from the column of the Rangers with a grenadier company, leaving Major Ross to conduct the corps to the heights, and arrived without being perceived within ten yards of the Indians. These now gave a yell and fired upon the grenadiers, wounding Colonel Simcoe and four others. The enemy were, however, quickly driven from the fences when Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton got among them, and he pursued them rapidly down van Cortlandt Ridge.

Though this ambushade failed in greater part, yet it was of importance. Nearly forty Indians were killed, and it was beyond question the most important action of the "Neutral Ground." Eighteen Indians were buried in the same pit in "Indian Field," by the "Indian Bridge," which still exists; and it is said that the spirit of the sachem yet walks abroad upon the scene of conflict.

In February, 1776, Colonel Augustus van Cortlandt, Clerk of New York City, reported to the Committee of Safety that, for their security, he had removed the public records to his family vault on Vault Hill. They were there until the following December, but it is probable that the British were soon afterward apprised of their place of concealment, and they were returned to the city. Five years later, Washington lighted bonfires on Vault Hill, deceiving the British encamped on the southern side of Spuyten Duyvil Creek, while the great body of his army was on the march to join Lafayette at Yorktown.

During the Revolution, the house was occupied most of the time by some of the van Cortlandt family. Col. James van Cortlandt was a member of the provincial congress, and his brother Frederick a captain of the West-

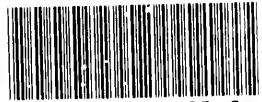


chester levies. The old Mansion saw the retreat of a part of the American army on its way to White Plains, in 1776.

When, in January, 1777, General Heath made a movement against the British outposts at King's Bridge, the right division under General Lincoln, on the night of the 17th, moved from Tarrytown by the old Albany Post Road to the heights above the Mansion, their camp being located in the woods back of the Mansion; and, on the 18th, General Lincoln "surprised the guard above van Cortlandt's, capturing arms, equipage," etc. A skirmish occurred at Fort Independence four days later. British troops were called to order under the apple trees to hear the Church of England service and prayers offered for King George. Armand's gallant French cavalry have charged over its fields, and the Mansion was ransacked by the British in their search for the brave colonel, who was far advanced on his retreat to Croton.

From its windows, during the grand reconnoissance, in 1781, could be seen the smart cavalry fight at the old bridge near the mill. In November, 1783, Washington passed down the old Albany Post Road, alighted at the mansion and drank a glass of "*Resurrection madeira*" to the health of the ladies and the thirteen States, and, amid the acclamation of the people, rode victorious across King's Bridge, over which he had retreated seven years before.

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